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AUTHOR Schnulle, Linda
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ABSTRACT

Primarily the result of observations made during an eighteen-day tour of the People's Republic of China (conducted by Professor Eugene Gilliom at Ohio State University), this paper examines working conditions and attitudes toward work in China. Focus in the first half of the paper is on motivation to work in China and how it differs from U.S. attitudes about individual freedom, security, and job satisfaction. The economic history of East and West are briefly traced (as parallel paths out of feudalism) to point up the resulting contrast in political and social context. Noting Chairman Mao's statement that "Our God is the masses of Chinese people," the author cites evidence of that philosophy among workers who indicate that when they die their children will carry on "the struggle." The second half of the paper is a discussion of working conditions in China today in terms of the standards which Michael Argyle sets up in his book, "The Social Philosophy of Work": (1) varied and meaningful work, (2) worker involvement in control of working conditions, (3) work appropriate to worker interests and abilities, (4) sufficient job security, pay, and status, (5) extrinsic motivation through integration of worker and organization goals, and (6) small worker groups with cohesiveness from group goals. The author comments on the effectiveness of Mao's programs and concludes that the average worker in China finds dignity and purpose to his labor because he knows it contributes to the good of the state. (JT)

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WORKING IN THE PEOPLE's REPUBLIC OF CHINA

This is primarily the result of observations made during an 18 day tour to the People's Republic of China conducted by Prof. Eugene Gilliom at the Ohio State University

Linda Schnulle
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Chairman Mao had said, "Our God is the masses of Chinese people" and so I was busy investigating to discover if the masses really believed that philosophy. "What will happen when you die, Mr. Wang?" I asked our group's interpreter, who was also my friend. The swiftness and certainty of his reply was startling to me, "I expect my children will carry on the struggle".

One would be tempted to ask "What struggle"? based only on a quick view around the Chinese countryside. Certainly the people work hard, but while any Iowa farmer or Gary steel worker might be inclined to call their work a struggle, neither would say that at their death they are hoping for their children to carry on that struggle. This is one of the most basic and powerful differences between the United States and the People's Republic of China today.

Since that day in 1949 when Mao Tse Tung stood atop Peking's Gates of Heavenly Peace and proclaimed the formulation of the People's Republic of China the struggle has not ended. In fact, that struggle has become a way of life to the Chinese. To our Western minds, it was difficult to comprehend our hosts when they spoke of a particular political enemy as being "counter-revolutionary", to us the revolution ended in 1949. But to the Chinese way of thinking 1949 marked the "liberation" of the people from the tyranny of Chiang Kai-shek and the years of service to feudal war lords. The revolution has become a way of life in China today, a basis for their social, philosophical, and economic thought, but most important, the source of their primary motivation to work. In the United States we feel that for the average American, politics should not interfer with his job or status in the community. In China we find a society where everything has an underlying political motive.

The examples of this political orientation are endless. At Peking University we asked the purpose of education in China today and received the answer, "Education should serve proletarian politics'" For one of the largest universities in China the goal is not to raise the student's level of intelligence or provide new thought, but rather, "to combine with labor to create totally political workers." It is this kind of thinking that caused Barbara Tuckman to comment on the nature of the university today:

"Courses are virtually vocational. The government of China has apparently made up it's mind, for the present, that it wants revolutionary impetus more than it wants advanced education; or perhaps it fears elitsm more than it needs intellectuals."[1]

At a July 21st College at the Peking Heavy Electrical Machinery Factory we learned that Chairman Mao had ordered the enrichment of the worker's education on that date, and their college worked toward that end. The educational policy in this factory school is "to develop a worker morally, physically, and intellectually with professional competence and social consciousness." Often during our factory visits we would hear the best workers described as those with "political consciousness and professional competence". As the days of our trip passed we began to feel that, given a choice between a worker who is professionally competent or socially conscious, the typical personnel man in China would prefer the latter.

The longer we remained in China the more I began to believe that Mao was certainly right. In China today, the God is the masses of people who could in the past work the miracle of the Great Wall and who today

work the miracle of the Red Flag Canal or of producing enough food to feed 935 million people. This kind of irreverence seems quite at home in China where people do everything for a political reason. They approach their political beliefs with a greater zeal than any Catholic country ever approached Catholicism, and they follow the teachings of Chairman Mao with more zest than that of ardent Christians studying the teachings of Christ. They work where the party assigns them and they do it to serve the people. They marry someone whose ideology most closely matches their own and discover that match through discussions as they are courting. Personal interests such as choosing a place to live or a job that suits one's particular interests are all foregone for the sake of the party. People live separate from their spouse or children for years, and do it gladly without a great deal of suffering or feeling of martyrdom because the party requests it. The virtue of this kind of selflessness is taught from an early age. In one Kindergarten we saw a performance of "The Big Apple Dance". In this dance a child moves through a circle of her friends, passing out apples, until only one child and two apples remain. Our dancer pauses for a moment as she realizes that, of the two apples, one is much bigger, but she gladly passes the larger of the two on to her comrade. The child receiving the big apple says, "No, give me the little apple!", and all the other children shout, "Here, take my apple!" but our dancer is content with the little apple knowing that she has served the people. It is not surprising then, that when the child is grown she may find a greater satisfaction from her factory meeting a quota than she does from the personal satisfaction of her individual job.

The basic assumptions that Americans start out with when we talk about working are without value in thinking about the motivation to work in China. Our attitudes toward individual freedom, the need to build security, and the desire for job satisfaction are as foreign to the Chinese as our language. Yet, it's interesting to note how similar our early beginnings were, and the forces that caused the differences in the development of these two countries.

Since prehistoric times man has always had to work to satisfy his needs. Sometimes it was enjoyable, sometimes it was not, but work has been necessary to provide food, clothing, shelter, and protection from enemies. This was the beginning as the people of China and the people who eventually came to the United States experienced it. East and West developed along vastly different cultural lines, but the economic system was the same for both for centuries. With the development of feudalism, manual work began to be regarded as servile and degrading.[2] This situation prevailed in China as late as 1928 when Chiang Kai-shek had succeeded, through force of arms, in establishing control over the country by incorporating powerful local warlords with a coalition of corrupt generals known as the "Whampoa Clique".[3]

For the United States, the rise out of feudalism happened slowly over time, and the progression might be capsualized as follows:

The feudal system in Europe began its collapse when labor became scarce after the Black Death.[4] As a result of the expansion of town and industry the possibility of working for payment came into being and became an incentive to work.[5] Work was regarded as natural and necessary but also as serving God and society. The feeling was that man should work hard, but not seek to enjoy the profits made through his efforts.

When craftsmen became prosperous they ceased to do the work themselves and became employers.6

At this time two principles, one scientific the other religious, began to govern Western man's feeling about work. The first was Social Darwinism which put forth the idea that only those species which were biologically fittest could survive their environment.7 The second was the Calvinistic doctrine of the Protestant Work Ethic which proposed predestination and the "calling of the elect".8 Calvin's view of human nature saw man as completely worthless because he inherited Adam's original sin. Man could be saved, but only through the grace of God, and man's vocation was the way he served God.9 Max Weber observed that the rise of protestantism and the rise of capitalism in Europe were concurrent. Reformers taught that men would be judged on the basis of their life's work, but on the other hand, that money should not be spent on oneself. This led to a life of hard work, discipline, and the accummulation of money that was not to be spent on luxury and could be put back into business.10 As Europeans immigrated to the states some people fled this idea while others adherred to it, but the seed of capitalism had been planted.

Feudalism in China was more splendid in its splendor and more horrid when it was horrible than Americans have ever known. We have only to look at the remnants of that time, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs, to realize the numbers of people who must have toiled in endless misery to create luxury for the very few. When we visited the Summer Palace our guides told us of the Dowager Empress and how she had 1000 servants to prepare and serve 128 course meals for her.

It was reported that every day she threw away enough food to feed 5000 peasants and that many dishes were prepared just to provide an aromatic odor in an otherwise stuffy room. But to me, the ancient custom of binding a girl child's feet to demonstrate her helplesness, wealth, and ability to be cared for totally, is a better demonstration of the mentality that could not conceive of a time when servants would not be unlimited in number and available for every possible task. It is no wonder that the Communist Party gained so much support from students and country people in 1921 when a little known Mao Tse-tung began establishing military bases in the country side.[11] The people had nothing to lose and freedom from hopeless subservience to gain. In her book about her trip to China, Shirley MacLaine records an interview with a woman who had lived through that time. I recount it here because it describes the hopelesness of the situation much better than statistics ever could:

"My grandfather was a poor peasant. He had no food for his family. During the famine of 1929 he was afraid his family wouldn't survive the harsh winter...he asked for some survival grain which he would pay back in the Spring but was refused... My grandfather was so desperate so he asked some other male relatives for help. They stole some grain - but not much - just enough to carry them through a few weeks... The Kuomintang arrested my grandfather and the other relatives involved. They were shot. So all the women in the family were widows. My mother was pregnant at the time. In old China it was customary never to allow a widow to bear a child in the home of her husband if the husband had died. My mother was forced to leave her husband's house and give birth to me in the fields."[12]

The sad story continues with details of the extreme poverty and despair suffered by the people, and ends with the woman's description of her struggle to flee the Kuomintang occupied land and join the Communist forces that were assembling in the hills outside of Yenan. The Nationalist attack at Yenan started two years of bitter civil war which ended on October first 1949 with Mao Tse-tung standing atop Peking's Gates of Heavenly Peace to proclaim the birth of the People's Republic of China.[13]

Looking at China today, one can not help but be impressed with how effective Mao's programs have been in moving the people of China out of the hopeless situation they had been in for so many centuries. To discuss the extent of that effectiveness I would like to consider working conditions in China today in terms of the standards which Michael Argyle sets up in his book, The Social Psychology of Work, which he suggests would create optimal working conditions to maximise productivity and job satisfaction in the United States today:[14]

(1) The nature of work should be varied and meaningful.

The average person in China today, whether a factory or farm worker, has never known a parliamentary democracy, or freedom in the Western sense, nor does he know it now. Yet he has more of a voice in the management of village affairs than he has ever had before. He is free from the bullying landlord and corrupt official. Women in China are now free from child marriage, concubinage, and slavery. They enjoy equality before the law and in the economy, as well as the right to divorce and abortion. Where 80% of the population was illiterate when the Communist Party was formed in 1949, only 10-15% illiteracy exists today.[15] While the work the people perform may not always be varied, it is meaningful because for the first time they can see the benefit of their labor and remember the time when this was not the case.

(2) The worker should have the freedom to choose the pace of work some level of control over working conditions.

While this freedom does not exist absolutely for each individual worker in China today, it does exist in a collective sense. Because the ultimate authority in each factory or commune is a committee made up of the workers-employed in that endeavor, the worker, in the final analysis has input into the decision-making process and must feel a greater sense of control over his working conditions than the average line worker in Detroit.

(3) Work should be appropriate to the worker's interests and abilities.

The nature of "appropriate" work in China is an interesting subject for discussion. Since most of China's people are from a rural agrarian background and because most of China's work needs involve the production of food for the people, it is easy to invision that the majority of the people should be able to find work that relates to their most fundamental interests and abilities. There is some feeling in the literature that, since the revolution, the subsequent regulated drop in university attendance, (which was brought about by Mao's desire to avoid having an unemployable intelligentsia) has been a cause of dissatisfaction to large numbers of bright young Chinese people who would like to be better educated. This feeling would justifiably be the case for those who remember the days when university attendance was a matter of money, class membership, and their own choice, but for the children of China today who sing:

"We are flowers of our Motherland,
We grow in the sun.
We are little Red Guards.
We must unite and welcome foreign guests.
We must be good little children of Chairman Mao,
We are all Chairman Mao's Children."[16]

It is easy to see how they may be more indoctrinated with the idea of serving the state, as is needed, when they reach college age. Any kind of work would be appropriate as long as it served the teachings of Chairman Mao, Chairman Hua, and the people.

(4) The job should offer sufficient security, pay and status.

This point is one that requires a little translating from an American idea to a Chinese one. Security in China is an emotional investment which is transferred from the family to society as a whole.[17] A girl of

thirteen who was asked to share her biggest worry replied, "I have none. I know that Chairman Mao and the party are concerned with my welfare and can protect me from any danger."[18]

Part of the insecurity that workers feel in most developing countries is the fear of unemployment. China quite neatly sidesteps this problem by assigning workers to jobs in a way that would give a cost accountant night mares. We saw endless examples of three people doing a job that one person would do in the states. However, when profit is not the major consideration who can say that this is not an effective way to avoid huge welfare roles. Everyone works, and no one fears the threat of being out of work. The most important thing is to do your job well, and serve the people.

Since the early days of the revolution, China has moved away from the communist principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.", with a graduated wage scale that is a kind of incentive system. It is possible, for example, for a chief engineer in a textiles plant who has been on the job several years to earn 188 yuan monthly ($78.33) while the head of the plant receives 166 yuan ($69.16). The system allows a skilled factory worker with long experience to earn more than his department head.[19] The salary a worker earns is enough to keep his family comfortably. While the average worker has no hope for great personal luxury, he has no fear of poverty either. He is secure in the notion that he can provide for most of his own needs, and rely on the state for the ones he cannot provide for himself.

In China the goal of increased earnings does not have the same importance it does for Americans. In Shanghai we visited an engineering

professor who earned 250 yuan a month, an incredible amount for China. We asked him if he thought he'd ever get a raise and he replied with quite genuine humility, "Oh, I'd be too embarrassed to accept it!" Of course, we must remember that without the consumer goods and ability to travel which is available to Americans there is really very little on which to spend extra money. During my trip I had the opportunity to ask two different commune women the question, "What would make your life better?" The first replied that she was saving for a sewing machine. The second woman already had a sewing machine and replied that she really couldn't think of a thing! Finally she offered that it would be nice if her commune had another television. Again in her response I saw the desire for the group welfare over personal goals.

It is often difficult to get managers in the factories to admit to their greater responsibilities as they are acting in response to Mao's dictum that cadres and intellectuals must integrate with the masses. Senior officials describe themselves as ordinary workers and dress as such. In fact, it is common for managers to put in time working at the most menial factory task so that they will not forget what it is to be a common laborer. Even at the ballet, it is not uncommon for the prima ballerina to work with the other dancers to sweep the stage and put up props at the end of a performance.

The average factory worker retires at age 60 and will continue to receive 70% of his salary. It is common for grandparents to move in with their children when they retire, and spend their days raising their grandchildren, although they can go on living on their own in factory housing if they choose. If they become ill the state provides medical care.[20] The elderly play cards and have political discussions with friends. In

The early morning we would see them out exercising in the street. The tradition in China has been for old age to be the best and most respected time of life and this is still the case today.

(5) <u>The worker's motivation should be extrinsic by alligning the worker's goals with the goals of the organization</u>.

During the Cultural Revolution, a massive purge was carried out, of industrial managers who gave priority to boosting production rather than to ideological considerations. Thousands were sent to May Seventh schools or to the countryside for re-education and eventual reassignment if they were deemed "reformed".[21] In factories and on communes as well, workers are encouraged to participate in self-criticism sessions where members point out actions they see as ideologically unsound to each other.

This technique was in especially heavy use just after the revolution when Mao's teachings were still open to some interpretation and no one was sure as to how the society would develop.

The self-criticism session is conducted at every level of Chinese life. The familial level, revolutionary committee level, university level, factory level, and middle school level. Most of the 935,000,000 Chinese, including the Central Committee and Chairman Hua himself, participate as often as a few times a week. During the sessions participants are encouraged to tell others what he thinks of them, as well as what he thinks of himself. As a result of such open and direct communication there is evidently a decrease in frustration, repressed emotions, anxiety, and fear.[22] These sessions, and the determination of the people to use them for self-improvement, have played a big part in the development of group goals and a spirit of individual satisfaction at reaching group goals.

(6) Working groups should be small and develop a cohesiveness from having a group goal.

While the self-criticism sessions play a large part in developing this group goal, there are other forms of indoctrination to this idea in evidence. In school children learn the tale of the "Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains". It is a fable which Mao told to illustrate the effect of the revolution on China. In the fable the Foolish Old Man and his sons set out to dig away two mountain peaks which are obstructing the view from the south. They are rediculed by their neighbors, but the old man says that his descendants will carry on the digging for generations until the job is done. According to the fable God was moved by this and sent two angels who carried the mountains away on their backs. Mao made this analogy: "Our God is none other than the masses of Chinese people. If they work with the Communist Party, the two mountains of imperialism and feudalism can be cleared away."23 This kind of teaching helps to build a feeling of unity among the masses. Even small children are taught to share and avoid competition as they play. If they learn not to compete over toys, they will be less likely to compete over material posessions in later life. They develop a common bond from being joined in a common task.

Margaret Mead once said, in analysis of our society, "Our problem is going to be how to devise a system in which every individual's participation in society is such that he has dignity and purpose, and the society has a rationale for distributing the results of its high productivity."24 It would seem that China has already attained the stage of development that Mead suggests we seek. The average worker in China finds dignity

and purpose to his labor because he knows that it contributes to the good of the state. China as a nation follows the policy of considering first the people and their welfare. This is the beginning of a cycle that can work to help China to overcome the years of feudalism with years of personal and social productivity for the people of China.

FOOTNOTES

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2. Argyle, Michael, The Social Psychology of Work, Taplinger Publishing Company, 1972. p. 19.
3. ., "The Rise and Fall of Mao's Empress", Time, Vol. 109, No. 12, March 21, 1977, p. 46.
4. Argyle, Michael, op.cit., p.20
5. Ibid., p. 21.
6. Ibid., p. 21.
7. Herzberg, Frederick, Work and the Nature of Man, World Publishing, 1966, p.34.
8. Ibid., p. 32.
9. Ibid., p. 23.
10. Argyle, Michael, op.cit., p. 22.
11. , "The Rise and Fall of Mao's Empress, op. cit., p. 48.
12. MacLaine, Shirley, You Can Get There From Here, Bantam Books, 1975, p. 190.
13. ., "The Rise and Fall of Mao's Empress", op. cit., p. 54.
14. Argyle, Michael, op. cit., p. 252.
15. Topping, Seymour, Between Two Chinas, Harper and Row Publishers, p. 300.
16. MacLaine, Shirley, op. cit., p. 119.
17. Snow, Edgar, Red China Today, Random House, p. 296.
18. Ibid., p. 295.
19. Topping, Seymour, op. cit., p. 328.
20. Ibid., p. 336.
21. Ibid., p. 331.
22. MacLaine, Shirley, op. cit., p. 187.
23. Topping, Seymour, op. cit., p. 285.
24. Mead, Margaret, The Changing Cultural Patterns of Work and Leisure, U. S. Department of Labor, January, 1967, p. 10.

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